

# Tablelands agricultural profile

2010/2011

## Tablelands region

The Tablelands agricultural production area, defined by the boundaries of the Tablelands Regional Council (TRC) local government area in far north Queensland, covers an area of 65,000km<sup>2</sup>. Most agricultural activity within the TRC occurs on the elevated, eastern highlands (6,000km<sup>2</sup>) from Julatten in the north, to Dimbulah in the west and to Ravenshoe in the south. Population within the TRC area is 47 000; concentrated in the major centres of Atherton, Herberton, Kuranda, Malanda, Mareeba and Ravenshoe, and the smaller centres of Chillagoe, Dimbulah, Irvinebank, Julatten, Millaa Millaa, Mt Garnet, Mt Molloy, Mutchilba, Tolga, Walkamin and Yungaburra.

## Industry diversity

Tablelands agriculture includes a large diversity of plant and animal industries and production of both tropical and subtropical crops. 39 large agricultural industries were identified in the Tablelands region in 2010/11. These represent four industry groups: tree crops, field crops, animal industries and lifestyle horticulture. The success and resilience of the Tablelands agriculture sector can be attributed to this industry diversity, which provides options to farmers to change crops and farming systems to adapt to market cycles and consumer demands.

## Climate

There is wide variation in climate across the Tablelands region, influenced by changes in altitude and the proximity of the Great Dividing Range. Elevated eastern areas are generally wetter and cooler, whereas western areas are hotter and drier. Winds from tropical cyclones are often of lower speed and are less damaging on the Tablelands than in adjacent coastal regions.

Locality	Elevation (m)	Annual rainfall (mm)	Average Temperature Range (°C)	
			January	July
Mareeba	400	918	21-31	11-25
Dimbulah	407	783	22-34	11-27
Atherton	752	1420	18-29	10-22
Malanda	738	1565	17-28	5-22
Ravenshoe	930	842	16-31	3-23

## Soils

Soil types vary markedly across the Tablelands. A typical agricultural soil in the Mareeba/Dimbulah area is derived from granite and has inherent low fertility. Soil profiles for these soils often comprise a sandy loam/sandy clay loam over a red, structured, coarse sandy clay soil with a slightly acid pH. Soils in the Atherton area are often derived from basalt, are well drained and have high fertility. Soil profiles for these soils usually comprise a red, structured, high clay soil with an acid-neutral pH.

## Water supplies

Water for the Mareeba-Dimbulah Irrigation Area is supplied from Tinaroo Dam through an extensive network of channels and streams. Farming enterprises in other parts of the Tablelands (including intensive agricultural areas around Atherton, Malanda and Ravenshoe) draw water from natural watercourses, bores and small dams.

## Gross value

Agricultural industries contributed gross revenues of over \$404 million to the Tablelands economy for the 2010/11 financial year. This represents an increase in the gross value of the Tablelands agricultural sector of approximately 23% over the past seven years, when compared with similar estimates for the 2003/04 financial year. Tree crop industries, valued

at \$220 million, are the largest component of the Tablelands agriculture sector. Field crops (\$90 million), animal industries (\$79 million) and lifestyle horticulture (\$15 million) also contributed significantly to the local economy.

### Gross Value of Production\* of Tablelands Agriculture, 2010/11

Agricultural activity	Area (ha)	No. of Farms	Volume sold	Unit	Gross Revenue (\$)
Aquaculture	30	17	423	tonnes	\$5,990,000
Avocado	850	70	6,300	tonnes	\$28,978,206
Banana	1,272	33	34,660	tonnes	\$95,188,720
Basil	38	9	729,600	bunches	\$875,520
Beef cattle	550,000	500	40,000	head	\$30,000,000
Cashews	240	1	100	tonnes	\$190,000
Citrus	402	250	6,672	tonnes	\$17,384,357
Coffee	215	7	323	tonnes	\$2,580,000
Custard apples	22	12	220	tonnes	\$726,000
Dairy cattle	8,800	62	56,000,000	litres	\$28,112,000
Flowers	40	28	4,995,000	stems	\$3,996,000
Forestry plantations	3600	10	32,000	cubic m	\$2,162,000
Grass seed	2,061	35	730	tonnes	\$6,679,600
Hay	3,168	55	11,406	tonnes	\$1,900,998
Honey	0	124	117	tonnes	\$386,595
Legume seed	853	20	1,275	tonnes	\$2,986,500
Longans	135	20	1,192	tonnes	\$3,575,700
Lychee	280	40	1,019	tonnes	\$7,642,500
Macadamia	58	3	145	tonnes	\$435,000
Maize	3,416	45	16,876	tonnes	\$4,472,140
Mango	2,500	200	13,975	tonnes	\$44,981,250
Melons	32	5	1,072	tonnes	\$841,312
Mixed fruit	17	18	207	tonnes	\$1,015,000
Mixed vegetables	71	24	2,156	tonnes	\$3,248,000
Nursery production	100	20	n/a	n/a	\$10,100,000
Papaya	200	15	7,781	tonnes	\$15,561,000
Passionfruit	15	20	225	tonnes	\$540,000
Peanuts	1,700	45	7,000	tonnes	\$5,950,000
Pineapples	60	1	2,688	tonnes	\$3,327,100
Pork	20	6	18,777	head	\$4,495,323
Potatoes	1,200	65	30,000	tonnes	\$19,500,000
Poultry (eggs)	10	2	1,534,651	cartons	\$4,375,192
Poultry (meat)	40	10	9,000,000	birds	\$5,850,000
Pumpkins	250	25	8,700	tonnes	\$6,525,000
Sugar	7,941	68	716,564	tonnes	\$27,874,340
Table grapes	54	8	324	tonnes	\$1,944,000
Tea	750	4	2,625	tonnes	\$2,625,000
Tea-tree	70	10	21,000	litres	\$665,000
Turf	27	2	221,645	meters <sup>2</sup>	\$787,922
<b>Totals</b>	<b>590,537</b>	<b>1,889</b>			<b>\$404,467,275</b>

### Tree crops

The banana industry, worth \$95.2 million is now the most valuable agricultural industry on the Tablelands. Significant new areas have been planted and banana prices in late 2010/11 were high due to damage from Tropical Cyclone Yasi to

coastal banana crops. The mango industry, representing the largest area of tree crops on the Tablelands, was valued at \$45 million. The Tablelands avocado industry has expanded in recent years although 2010/11 values (\$29 million) were impacted by yield losses from Tropical Cyclone Yasi. Other tree crop industries which have experienced significant growth over the past seven years include the citrus industry, particularly limes, (\$17.4 million) and the papaya industry (\$15.6 million), which have both nearly doubled in size.

Smaller Tablelands tree crop industries include lychee (\$7.6 million), longan (\$3.6 million), table grapes (\$1.9 million), custard apples (\$0.7 million), passionfruit (\$0.5 million), macadamias (\$0.4 million) and cashews (\$0.2 million). Mixed fruits including carambola, jackfruit, dragonfruit, low-chill stone fruit, and persimmons were collectively valued at \$1.0 million. Forestry plantations (Caribbean & hoop pine) were valued at \$2.2million.

### Field crops

The potato (\$19.5 million), peanut (\$6 million) and maize (\$4.5 million) industries are all traditional, well-known Tablelands field crops and have all experienced declines in value and area planted over the past seven years. The sugar (\$27.9 million), grass seed (\$6.7 million), legume seed (\$3 million) and associated hay (\$1.9 million) industries have remained relatively stable over this same period.

Other important Tablelands field crop industries that have remained stable or have grown in value over the past seven years include pumpkins (\$6.5 millions), mixed vegetables (\$3.3 millions), pineapples (\$3.3 million), basil (\$0.9 million) and melons (\$0.8 million). The tea and coffee industries are valued at \$2.6 m each. The tea-tree oil and mulch industry, which was in decline for many years, is now valued at \$0.7 million.

### Lifestyle horticulture

The diverse and dynamic lifestyle horticulture sector is greatly affected by global economic trends and their influence on consumer confidence and spending. Production nurseries (\$10.1 million) are the largest lifestyle horticulture industry on the Tablelands despite recent declines in sales of plantation timber

seedlings and landscape plants. The turf industry (\$0.8 million) has decreased by > 50% in recent years due to the downturn in the building industry. The value of the cut flower and foliage industry remained relatively stable at \$4.0 million.

### Animal industries

The beef cattle industry (\$30 million) is the most widely distributed agricultural industry on the Tablelands and the primary land use in the central and western parts of this region. Beef has experienced growth in recent years, particularly in the southern Tablelands where there has been a conversion from other industries (often dairy) to beef cattle production. The dairy industry (\$28.1 million) has experienced the most significant downturn of all Tablelands agricultural industries, with a 50% reduction in gross value over the past 10 years. The aquaculture industry, including barramundi, eels, crayfish and crocodiles, was valued at \$6 million. The poultry meat industry (\$5.9 million) has experienced good growth in recent years. Other

intensive livestock industries, pork (\$4.5 million) and poultry eggs (\$4.4 million) remain important Tablelands animal industries. The honey industry with 124 registered beekeepers is valued at \$0.4 million, and provides essential pollination services for many Tablelands crop industries.

### For more information

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**\*Gross Value of Production:** Value of production at wholesale prices realised in the marketplace (does not include value-added products).

**Data sources:** Industry figures were calculated using data from multiple industry, government and grower sources and should be recognised as best estimates only.

Relative Gross Value of Production for Tablelands Agricultural Industries, 2010/11

